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## INTERNALISM AND EXTERNALISM IN SPEECH ACT THEORY

### **Abstract**

Internalism (Frege; Searle) and externalism (Putnam 1975; Burge 1979) are related doctrines in the philosophy of language and mind, mostly centered on the role of reference in the individuation of propositions. This debate has recently been extended in speech act theory from content to force. But here the landscape becomes more complicated. It has been recently argued that speech act theory got off the track after Austin by internalizing Austin's "felicity" conditions. In reply it is noted that the issue of internalism and externalism is more nuanced—there are internal and external elements in many theories, and a preliminary categorization is attempted here. Furthermore, internalism also has its virtues, which are largely overlooked, and we attempt to redress that imbalance.

### **Keywords**

Internalism, externalism, proposition, speech act, force, Austin, Grice.

## **1. Introduction**

"Internalism" and "externalism" are related doctrines in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language—more specifically in semantics.<sup>1</sup> Although there are many versions of these positions, the rough idea is clear. Internalists hold that the content of thoughts or the proposition expressed by the utterance of a sentence can be identified and specified independently of things "in the world" that those thoughts or

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<sup>1</sup> For a good short general survey see the Wikipedia article: "Internalism and Externalism." For the semantic version see Farkas (2006), and references therein.

propositions are about (also called “narrow content”). Externalists, predictably, deny this, and hold that at least some contents of thoughts and propositions expressed can be identified only by identifying the things in the world they are about (also called “wide content”). These positions are naturally traced back to a dispute between Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. Frege held that expressed propositions (he called them “Gedanke” or thoughts) are structured out of “senses,” which basically put conditions on reference to items in the world. For Frege, one could grasp a proposition even if there were no references for its constituents. Russell denied this. For him, some propositions actually contain the objects that they are about. One cannot grasp the proposition without grasping that object.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a reaction to Frege set in, and under the banner of “The New Theory of Reference” (also called “The Causal Theory of Reference”) authors such as Kripke, Donnellan, Kaplan, Putnam and Burge developed versions of externalism. When the philosophy of mind began to blossom at about the same time some of these authors, especially Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979), championed versions of externalism (or anti-“individualism”) for mental contents as well. For instance, Putnam (1975) argued that our word “water” can only be used to refer to H<sub>2</sub>O, and Burge (1979) argued that our word “arthritis” can only be used to refer to an inflammation of the joints. In this way, the nature of things being referred to (“natural kind externalism”), or the practices of the linguistic community (“social externalism”) contribute to identifying the content of one’s utterances and thoughts. If we imagine a “world” where the stuff in lakes etc. is XYZ and is called “water” and the linguistic community applied “arthritis” to inflammation of the muscles, but everything else including the internal states of the speakers remains the same, Putnam and Burge would deny that a speaker there meant by “water” and “arthritis” what we mean.

These controversies played out pretty much independently of the evolving area of speech act theory, even though Austin’s seminal volume was published in 1962, about the same time as the first eruptions of the “New Theory of Reference.” At most these debates were thought to concern the nature of the proposition (or thought) expressed in the performance of a speech act, not the identity or nature of the force of the speech act itself. Speech act theory has its own version of the internalism-externalism debate, but it is, at least until recently, implicit rather than explicit. It had to do with the nature of the conditions set down on the analysis of the force of successful speech acts. If a condition restricts the way the “external” world must be, it is an externalist condition. If a condition restricts the mental state(s) of a speaker/hearer, it is an internalist condition. Some theorists seem to side with the internalist end of the spectrum, some with the externalist end, and others have offered mixed analyses. Placing a particular theorist (or theory) in any given position on the scale is not uncontroversial, so to avoid irrelevant disputes, what follows will be fairly general and will be only a first approximation.

## 2. Classifying Speech Act Theories<sup>2</sup>

It is possible to classify speech act theories in many ways; we are interested here in just two: with regard to internalism-externalism, and with regard to basic theoretical machinery.

### 2.1. The internalism-externalism spectrum in Speech Act Theory

We use the idea that a theory is internalist if it predominately uses psychological states in the analysis of speech acts; if it predominately avoids psychological states, it is externalist, and if it uses both kinds of states, it is mixed:

<u>Internalist</u>	>	<u>Mixed</u>	>	<u>Externalist</u>
Grice (1968)		Austin (1962)		Gazdar (1981)
Schiffer (1972)		Searle (1969, 1975)		
Holdcroft (1978)		Bach and Harnish (1979)		
Alston (2000)		Searle and Vanderveken (1985)		

Speech act theories can also be classified in terms of their basic theoretical machinery.

### 2.2. The rules vs. intentions spectrum in Speech Act Theory

The two major dimensions seem to have been Convention-Rule-Norm (C-R-N) based theories, Intention-Inference (I-I) based theories, and mixed theories. The leading idea in C-R-N theories is that speech acts, and especially illocutionary acts and their components (such as acts of reference) are best analyzed in terms of being performed in accordance with rules, conventions and/or norms. Characterizing a particular speech act is characterizing the rules, conventions and/or norms that govern it. Taxonomizing speech acts involves categorizing them in term of these rules, conventions and/or norms. And successful communication is analyzed in terms of shared rules, conventions and/or norms. The leading idea in I-I theories is that speech acts, and especially illocutionary acts and their components (such as acts of reference) are best analyzed in terms of being the expression of certain kinds of intention. Characterizing a particular speech act is characterizing the intentions (or other

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<sup>2</sup> In what follows we concentrate on works devoted (more or less) to speech acts, and not to linguistic devices for performing speech acts (Sadock 1974), communication and cognition in general (Sperber and Wilson 1986), speech act verbs (Wierzbicka 1987) or conversational and social context (Geis 1995).

intentional states) it expresses. Taxonomizing speech acts involves categorizing them in term of these expressed intentions (or other intentional states). And successful communication is analyzed in terms of inferential recognition of these expressed intentions (or other intentional states):

<u>C-R-N</u>	<u>I-I</u>	<u>Mixed</u>
Austin	Grice	Bach and Harnish
Searle (1969)	Schiffer	Searle (1975)
Alston	Holdcroft	Searle and Vanderveken
Gazdar		

Once more, placing a particular theorist (or theory) in any given category is not uncontroversial, so to avoid irrelevant disputes, this categorization is fairly general and only a first approximation.

### 3. Comments on the classifications

First, the above classifications suggest that there is no simple progression of theorizing over time from one type of theory to another. Austin, arguably the father of speech act theory,<sup>3</sup> was a C-R-N theorist with mixed internalist and externalist components. Searle, his student, was the same. Alston (1991), also in the C-R-N tradition, turned away from Searle's mixed conditions to straightforwardly internalist ones. Having criticized Searle's theory, Alston (1991: 66) wrote: "The most fundamental and important difference is that, with respect to Searle's [conditions (4)-(6) and (9) on promising], we have shifted from a straightforward requirement of objective states of affairs to the 'internalized' requirement that S take responsibility for these states of affairs obtaining." On the other hand, Grice, insofar as he discussed speech acts, seems to have been an I-I theorist and internalist. Schiffer, his student, was the same, as was Holdcroft. Grice, Schiffer and Holdcroft do not offer analyses of institutional acts, such as adjourning a meeting, so maybe they would not be pure internalists. But given what they wrote, they are. Mixed cases cause categorization problems. Searle (1975), Searle and Vanderveken (1985) are mixed cases in the sense that the conditions on the successful performance of an illocutionary act are stated both (i) in terms of the way the non-mental world is, and regarding thoughts or the speaker-hearer (ii) in terms of intentions and (constitutive) rules. Bach and Harnish (1979) is a mixed case in the sense that conditions for communicative illocutionary acts are stated in terms of expressing and recognizing psychological states

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<sup>3</sup> Harnish (2001) argues that Frege had a generally internalist theory as early as 1892 – the grandfather of speech act theory?

(internalist), but conventional (or institutional) acts involve conditions on the non-mental world (externalist). Second, we can see that there is a rough correlation between the two classifications. I-I theorists analyze speech acts and communication in terms of intentions and other mental states, which are “internalist” elements. C-R-N theorists analyze speech acts and communication in terms of conditions governing the utterance of expressions, and these are often stated as ways the (non mental) world must be, and so are externalist.

#### **4. Historical dynamics within Speech Act Theory**

Nevertheless, we can see a general tendency for theories to be roughly “Austinian” or “Gricean,” and in the case of mixed theories, to have Austinian and Gricean elements. To understand the tension between these tendencies we need to go into them further.<sup>4</sup>

##### **4.1. The Austinian tradition**

For Austin (1962), the target of analysis was “the total speech act in the total speech situation.” He had a lot more to say about the former than the latter. Although for him speech acts are both events of producing pieces of language, “vocables” (speaking), and types of full-fledged doings (actions), Austin (1962) had almost nothing novel or constructive to say about speaking, beyond vague allusions to speech sounds, traditional grammar, and even more obscurely, meaning, sense and reference. He also had almost nothing to say about the nature of successful communication (or how it is achieved) beyond some brief remarks on illocutionary “uptake.” Indeed, the impression left is that communicative uses of language figure less prominently in Austin’s theorizing than ceremonial uses of language. It was the description of the speech event at various levels of abstraction and interaction (the various senses in which “saying is doing”) that fascinated him, especially the levels of the illocutionary and the perlocutionary.<sup>5</sup> He never satisfactorily distinguished these categories, and could not even come up with a slogan for the illocutionary.<sup>6</sup> He resorted instead to

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion see Harnish (2005a: “Communicating with the Moods of English”; Harnish 2005b: “Commitments and Speech Acts”), from which the following paragraphs are drawn.

<sup>5</sup> Originally, of course, it was performatives vs. constatives, before the former swallowed the latter.

<sup>6</sup> Locutions were characterized in terms of “saying in the full normal sense of saying” and in terms of being produced with a “definite sense and reference.” Perlocutions were characterized in terms of the “effects on the thoughts and feelings” of the participants.

giving examples, some generalizations, and a few difficult-to-interpret comments such as “a judge could tell,” “performed by conforming to a convention,” “can be made explicit by the performative formula.” Perhaps the closest he came to characterizing illocutionary acts in general is with his doctrine of “felicity conditions,” originally fashioned for the performative side of the performative-constative distinction. But even here only “misfires” capture conditions necessary for the successful performance of the acts, “abuses” merely render the act defective.<sup>7</sup> And beyond a few illocutionary acts such as assertion and promising, Austin had little to say about success conditions on illocutionary acts.<sup>8</sup> Austin, in fact, gives at least the appearance of being more concerned with speech acts as acts, embedded in social and physical contexts, than as speech. These shortcomings add up to why speech act theorists turned away from the Austinian paradigm.

#### 4.2. The move to the Gricean tradition

Why did internalism emerge in speech act theory? The Austinian paradigm had certain limitations:

1. (From above) There was no analysis of a “convention” that could ground the Austinian conception of an illocutionary act (and so differentiate it from perlocutionary acts), so there was no (theoretical) characterization of the illocution.
2. There was no coherent, principled taxonomy of illocutionary acts based on their nature.
3. There was no integration of illocutionary acts with the nature of successful linguistic communication.
4. Related to this, there was no explanation (or even an explanation schema) of why speakers would utter what they utter, given what they wanted to communicate, or how hearers could understand speakers, given what they utter and the context in which they utter it.
5. There was no serious attempt to relate illocutionary acts to the detailed structure of a language,<sup>9</sup> hence no explanation of how speakers could perform (and hearers could understand) an unbounded number of novel illocutionary acts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Harnish and Plunze (2006) for more discussion.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, Austin labors through parts of various chapters to find criteria to distinguish illocutionary from perlocutionary acts, and fails to his satisfaction.

<sup>9</sup> Lecture VI contains some informal remarks on various “primitive devices in speech,” such as mood, tone of voice, connecting particles, whose role has been usurped by the explicit performative.

<sup>10</sup> On the present usage an illocutionary act consists of an illocutionary force plus a (usually propositional) content.

In the time between Austin and Grice there was a change in the focus of concern with speech acts. After Grice it was not as interesting whether or not marriage is infelicitous if the groom doesn't kiss the bride. What is interesting is how communicating with language works when illocutionary acts are involved; how we explain facts of language use, not just describe them. And given that the paradigm of psychological explanation at the time was "belief-desire" psychology,<sup>11</sup> the stage was set for internalism. Internalists thought they could overcome the limitations of the Austinian paradigm in a principled way. Internalists believed that the various limitations were not accidental, but connected, and they attempted to formulate a conception of language, illocutionary acts, and communication that would avoid those inadequacies.

#### **4.3. The Gricean tradition**

So how did internalists deal with the above inadequacies? Short answer: by going internal (each in their own way). Longer answer: Suppose communicative intentions are meaning intentions and that Grice is roughly right that meaning intentions can be analyzed in terms of having (and if successful, recognizing) complex propositional attitudes. Suppose a central class of illocutionary acts is communicative in nature, and involve expressing and recognizing complex propositional attitudes, and suppose that the performance of illocutionary acts in this class can be defined in terms of the propositional attitude expressed by the speaker, and the understanding of such communicative acts can be defined as the recognition of such propositional attitudes by the hearer. Finally, suppose that the recognition of such expressed propositional attitudes on the part of the hearer is guided by a shared system of inference strategies, presumptions, and contextual information, all stated in terms of propositional attitudes. Then the way is at least open to accomplish some of the things alluded to in 1-5 above:

- 1<sup>?</sup>. Illocutionary acts can be defined, and so differentiated from perlocutionary acts, on principle.
- 2<sup>?</sup>. Kinds of (communicative) illocutionary acts can be defined in terms of the kinds of attitude(s) expressed, and so be based on their nature.
- 3<sup>?</sup>. Successful illocutionary communication can be characterized as the recognition of the expressed propositional attitude, and the intention to communicate is having that recognition intended.

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<sup>11</sup> Perhaps better described as "propositional attitude psychology."

- 4<sup>7</sup>. Psychological explanations, which connect people's beliefs and desires to their intentions to act, could now be applied to illocutionary communication.
- 5<sup>7</sup>. Linguistic structure can be seen as encoding certain pieces of information relevant to, though not usually determinative of, illocutionary force and content. Given (mutually believed) contextual information, the hearer can unify language and context to inductively infer the speaker's communicative intent and hence the (communicative) illocutionary act performed.

These are not insignificant virtues, especially to philosophers. Again, if communicative speech act theory could be stated in the vocabulary of propositional attitudes, that would have a "metaphysical" benefit as well – there would be no high-level entities and concepts such as "conventions." And it would have a concomitant "epistemological" benefit – putting communicative uses of language within the reach of traditional psychological explanations.

#### 4.4. Problems with the Gricean tradition

A number of theorists have doubts about the character of Gricean theories in general:

1. That the notion of what is said is not necessary for the analysis of what illocutionary act is being performed (Alston 2000).<sup>12</sup>
2. That many "communicative" illocutionary acts can in principle be performed non-communicatively, and in fact that non-communicative uses are "basic" and communicative uses involve an additional communicative intention (Searle 1983: 1986; Alston 2000)
3. That not all illocutionary acts, at least as ordinarily understood, can be analyzed in terms merely of expressing a propositional attitude (Searle 1975; Alston 2000)
4. The notion of an illocutionary act is intuitively a single category, not a spectrum or disjunction of categories. That is, Austin (1962), Searle (1975) and Alston (2000) all present homogeneous theories of illocutionary acts, analyses of all illocutionary acts that draw on the same pool of concepts, and no distinction is drawn between those that are in some way "communicative" and those that are "institutional."<sup>13</sup> Strawson (1964) suggested a spectrum of conventionality, and Bach and Harnish (1979) sharply distinguished the two categories.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that what is said plays a role in the communicative inference, according to Bach and Harnish (1979), but not in the characterization of (communicative) illocutionary acts.

<sup>13</sup> This needs a short qualification. Searle's "Declarations" have the distinction of two directions of fit and no sincerity condition, and in Alston's "Exercitives" the illocutionary act is merely "purported."

5. The notion of an illocutionary act sometimes (Searle) or always (Alston) involves normative notions such as “commitment,” taking responsibility for, etc., and these notions are not captured by expressed attitudes.

There are various suggestions for how to deal with these issues, but we will not pursue them here.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. Another view of these historical dynamics<sup>15</sup>

Sbisà wants to argue for “an Austin-inspired conception of speech acts as context-changing social actions” (2002: 421), which for her means that

the context of a speech act should be considered as constructed as opposed to given, limited as opposed to extensible [sic] in any direction, and objective as opposed to cognitive. (Sbisà 2002: 421)

She thinks that speech act theory got off-track, basically, by internalizing “felicity” conditions in terms of speaker’s (and hearer’s) propositional attitudes (2002: 422, 424). This happened primarily with Grice and Searle (2002: 424), and was compounded by Strawson, Schiffer, Bach and Harnish, Sperber and Wilson, and others (Sbisà 2002: 422-424).<sup>16</sup> On the original Austinian conception:

The context of a speech act seems to be conceived [...] as a cluster of actual states of affairs or events of various kinds [...] No sharp distinction is drawn between external states of affairs or events [...] and psychological states or attitudes of the participants [...] The prevailing emphasis is, however, on whether the contextual requirements for the felicity of speech acts are satisfied by the actual situation, as opposed to being merely believed to be satisfied. (Sbisà 2002: 422)

So, Austin was basically an “externalist” with regards to felicity conditions, whereas current theory, starting with Grice and Searle, tends to be basically “internalist.” The above seems roughly right for Austin and Grice (insofar as Grice can be said to have worked on speech acts), but not for Searle. Sbisà says:

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<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Harnish (2005a, b, c). The second article attempts briefly to reconcile Austinian and Gricean approaches.

<sup>15</sup> For more discussion see Harnish (2007), to which the following paragraphs are indebted.

<sup>16</sup> She does not mention Searle and Vanderveken (1985), Vanderveken (1990) nor Alston (2000), whose normativism includes both internal (mental) and external (social) components.

It is in Searle's discussion of successfulness conditions for illocutionary acts [...] that context begins to be considered rather as a set of propositional attitudes. (Sbisà 2002: 422)

But a glance at Searle's (1969) conditions (and rules) for promising reveals the same kind of mixture of internal and external conditions as one finds in Austin (which is not surprising since the analysis was modelled on Austin's). Thus, for instance, we find preparatory conditions that state both that (i) the promised act must be in H's interest, and that (ii) S must believe that this is so. And Searle (1975) seems even more externalist. Sbisà comments that:

In his search for a precise definition of illocutionary classes, he [Searle (1975)] focuses on three selected dimensions of the speech act (illocutionary point, direction of fit, expressed inner state) and correspondingly moves conditions on external social circumstances to a marginal position, as inessential to the illocutionary act. (Sbisà 2002: 422)

This comment ignores a number of things. First, it is the point or purpose of the act, not of (just) the speaker that is at issue for Searle.<sup>17</sup> Second, although only four (not three, as Sbisà says; Searle also includes "propositional content")<sup>18</sup> of the twelve "dimensions of difference" are employed in Searle's taxonomy to define the highest five categories, they are all employed to differentiate subcategories: i.e. to distinguish each illocutionary act from other illocutionary acts. So, as far as "felicity conditions" on speech acts goes they all count and most of them are external – only one is clearly internal (D3), one is marginal (D4), and the rest (ten) are clearly external. This hardly renders circumstances "marginal" or "inessential."

Indeed, Sbisà bends history a bit by portraying internalists as a continuation along a slope initiated by Searle. Bach and Harnish (1979), for one (so to speak), were reacting to the externalism of Searle, not carrying on his internalism.<sup>19</sup> From the Bach and Harnish point of view there was nothing fundamentally different in this regard between Austin and Searle.<sup>20</sup> It was not Searle who took the "internalist" turn, it was

<sup>17</sup> Searle (1991: 100), replying to a criticism of Alston's on just this issue, says that the illocutionary point is the point the act has "in virtue of being an act of that type."

<sup>18</sup> Sbisà might have had in mind the fact that of the four conditions defining an illocutionary category, "illocutionary point or purpose" is said to determine two of the others (direction of fit and sincerity condition). But the relation of determining does not require that if the thing doing the determining is psychological, the thing determined must be psychological.

<sup>19</sup> See Alston (2000) for a more contemporary version of the same sort of complaint.

<sup>20</sup> There were, of course, important differences in other regards, mainly the improved systematicity in Searle's theory (analysis and taxonomy) and his attempt to make it compatible with conceptions of linguistic structure by invoking the Fregean distinction between force indicators and content indicators. See Harnish (2001).

rather Grice-inspired theories of speech acts descending from Strawson (1964) that did – Schiffer (1972), Holdcroft (1978) and the communicative acts of Bach and Harnish (1979). Sbisà has little to say about why speech act theorists took the internalist turn, beyond the remark that it was due more to:

its higher degree of plausibility within the framework of received views of language and communication than to any evidence it may provide for the non-viability of the Austinian proposal. (Sbisà 2002: 424)

But the “Austinian proposal” is a mixture of internal and external conditions with external predominating, and we have just seen that this was Searle’s view as well. And what are these “received views of language and communication” that promoted the internalist position? Presumably Chomskyan views about linguistic structure and Gricean views about linguistic communication. It was precisely with the latter that pressure on the Austinian paradigm came from. As Strawson (1964) so clearly pointed out: (i) not all illocutionary acts, and especially not the central ones for communication (making statements, issuing requests, asking questions), seemed to be governed by “conventions” in any usual sense of that term, and (ii) nobody, in defense of the conventionalist position, had given a single example of such a convention.

According to Sbisà:

The turn from context as actual states of affairs and events to context as consisting of propositional attitudes has influenced the very conception of speech act. (Sbisà 2002: 423)

She illustrates this “turn” by citing a change from having the intention to undertake an obligation, as a part of the essential condition in Searle’s early theory, to its appearances as part of the illocutionary point “whose recognition coincides with the success of the act in question” (2002: 424). But that is not Searle, it is Bach and Harnish.<sup>21</sup> Searle only requires that the speaker have the relevant intentions in the relevant circumstances for the act to be successful (and perhaps non-defective). So far, then, Searle, by containing both internal and external factors, seems as immune to anti-internalist complaints as Austin. Bach and Harnish, however, are clearly internalists as far as the usual “communicative” illocutionary acts go, and Sbisà claims that in the inferences the theory uses to explain successful communication, and in the definitions of communicative illocutionary acts “any reference to social situational factors has disappeared” (2002: 422). Have they? Not really; you can still see them, all of them. They are right there in the contents of all those mutual contextual beliefs,

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<sup>21</sup> “Not only are such [communicative] intentions reflexive, their fulfillment consists in their recognition” (Bach and Harnish 1979: 15).

presumptions and expressed attitudes. This is how internalists get (many of) the virtues of externalism. For the (communicative illocutionary) act to be successful the speaker has to have the appropriate intention (e.g. the intention to express certain propositional attitudes such as belief, desire, etc. that P), but for the act to be non-defective these attitudes (the belief, desire, etc.) need to be satisfied; in the important case of beliefs, they have to be true. For example, on some I-I theories, to promise H to do A involves expressing the belief that A is in H's interest. If it is not, the promise is defective, though there is still a promise.<sup>22</sup> All of this is masked by Sbisà's tendency to use "felicity" to cover both success and non-defectiveness:

where felicity conditions provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the appropriate performance of a speech act. (Sbisà 2002: 423)<sup>23</sup>

In sum, internalists have available two distinctions that Sbisà does not always credit them with: success vs. non-defectiveness conditions<sup>24</sup> (together constituting "felicity conditions" on Austin and Searle's), and expressing propositional attitudes vs. having those attitudes vs. those attitudes being satisfied (i.e. true, fulfilled, etc.). The failure to note these detracts from some of her points:

If context consisted of intentional states, the felicity of a speech act would demand too little of the agent: it would demand him or her that he or she has certain intentional states [sic], but not that the representations involved yield a correct grasp of the situation, and not even that he or she has made sure this is so. (Sbisà 2002: 428)

Why, we might ask, can't we demand "that the representations involved yield a correct grasp of the situation"? Surely this is a dimension of appraisal open to internalists in principle. The same goes for Sbisà's conclusions regarding (i) ordering someone to close the door, when the door is closed, and (ii) apologizing for something one is not responsible for:

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<sup>22</sup> There is also the case of not having the attitude one expresses. If in asserting I express the belief that P, but do not believe that P, I am at best being misleading, perhaps even lying (though I might have to believe that P is false for that). See Harnish and Plunze (2006) for further discussion.

<sup>23</sup> Sbisà has Searle in mind here, and although Searle does not use "felicity condition" to describe his conditions, nor does he talk about "appropriate" performances (he talks about "sincere and non-defective" uses of language), his conditions and rules nevertheless do not explicitly or systematically distinguish success from (mere) defectiveness. See Harnish and Plunze (2006) for more discussion.

<sup>24</sup> They also have "contextual appropriateness conditions," but those are not at issue here. See Harnish (1983) for more discussion.

If we were not interested in the mere appearance of appropriateness, but in actual appropriateness [...] we have to take context into account not as a set of cognitive states and intentional attitudes, but as a bunch of circumstances, either material or social. (Sbisà 2002: 428)

Yet the internalist is free to: (i) assign “Shut the door” the compliance condition: ‘(S intends) H make it the case that the door be shut, which if complied with necessitates that the door have been open.’<sup>25</sup> (ii) Assign “I apologize for my cat having ruined your book” the condition that the speaker believe their cat ruined your book. In each case the satisfaction of the attitude requires a certain circumstance to obtain, so this “external” dimension is available to the internalist as well.

What, according to Sbisà, would externalism look like and why should we want it? There is one central idea and three corollaries:

1. Speech acts are context-changing social actions, where:
  - a. Contexts are constructed vs. given,
  - b. Contexts are limited vs. indefinitely extendable,
  - c. Contexts are objective vs. cognitive (psychological).

Before looking at Sbisà’s construal of these terms note that there is a fairly trivial way of taking all of these that is compatible with internalism:

*II.* Speech acts are typically communicative (and so social), and their performance changes the context from one in which that act was not performed into one in which it was performed.

This sense of “context-changing social actions” you get for free if you are an internalist, so Sbisà had better mean something stronger.

*aI.* As a corollary of *II*, if context includes the fact that the act has (or has not) been performed, then of course it can be “constructed” by performing the act.

Here we want to be on the lookout that not all aspects of context are supposed to be constructed in this sense. For instance, a speaker’s authority to order somebody to do something, hire-and-fire someone, or adjourn a meeting is not something created by the speaker in ordering, etc.

*bI.* If human cognitive and representational capacities are finite then the contextual information they can represent will be finite, and so limited, and not indefinitely extendable.

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<sup>25</sup> See Harnish (1994, 2005a, 2005c) and Ludwig (2003) for further discussion.

*cI.* Contextual beliefs are beliefs about context, so of course contexts are “objective not subjective” i.e. what makes the contextual beliefs true or false is the way the context is.

Here we need to watch out that “objective” does not contrast importantly with “psychological.” That one is in such and such psychological state is as much an objective fact as that one has such and such height.<sup>26</sup>

With these caveats we can turn to Sbisà’s proposals.

### 5.1. Social actions

According to Sbisà, by a “social” action she means:

any action whose agent and patient are members of society, but also [...] any action whose performance needs a social environment [...] Hitting somebody may be a social action in the former sense, offending somebody is a social action also in the latter. (Sbisà 2002: 421)

This is puzzling. First, what is gained by defining “social action” in terms of “social environment”? It is “social” we want to know more about. Second, is it really true that one could not hit someone unless they are a member of society (hermits cannot be hit)? Third, in what sense does giving offense require a “social environment”? And how does anyone know this?

### 5.2. Context is constructed

Sometimes it looks as if Sbisà wants to claim that all context is constructed, not given:

... there is reason to doubt that the context of a speech acts has already been settled before that speech act is performed. (Sbisà 2002: 425)

... the context of an interactional event is set up by its participants as the interaction proceeds. (Sbisà 2002: 426)

As we noted above, there seem to be many aspects of context important to the illocutionary acts being performed where this is not the case, and one wonders why these putative facts are not addressed.

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<sup>26</sup> The word “subjective” masks this difference, by being used to mean both “a matter of opinion” (hence not objective) and “psychological” (hence not public).

### 5.3. Context is limited

Sbisà's model of limited context seems to be Austin's "doctrine of infelicities":

In Austin (1962), the context pertinent to a speech act is limited, because felicity rules single out those aspects of the situation against which the felicity of the speech act is to be evaluated. (2002: 426)<sup>27</sup>

The assumption here is that Austin's catalogue of "infelicities" is complete, but why assume that? What principle keeps one from continuing to add ways that an utterance can be "infelicitous"? For instance, Austin has no "infelicity" for shouting a question in a library, yet in one natural sense, that is an "infelicitous" performance. Such a list would seem to be indefinitely extendable. Sbisà gives two considerations on behalf of the principle that context is limited. She argues from the fact that language use is always "situated," first that:

the context dependence of meaning<sup>28</sup> [...] has also been noticed and discussed by philosophers of language as regards indexicals, demonstratives, descriptions, domains of quantification and even whole propositions. (Sbisà 2002: 427);

second that:

... in order to yield a definite evaluation of a speech act (in terms of felicity, appropriateness/inappropriateness, truth/falsity), context must itself be delimited. (Sbisà 2002: 427)

However, these considerations do not show that context is limited, what they show is that appeals to contextual information, for the above purposes, are limited. For

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<sup>27</sup> No citation is given for the claim that Austin held these to be "rules." Austin tended to talk about "conventions" though he did flirt with the 'rules' label from time to time. For instance, Austin (1960: 224) talks about infelicities arising "if certain rules [...] are broken", but then he goes on to give as an example not something that can be obeyed or broken, but a condition, in this case the existence of a conventional procedure for accomplishing something. See e.g. Bach and Harnish (1979) for an attempt to separate these notions: conditions, rules and conventions. Searle's adaption of Austin's felicity conditions as necessary and sufficient conditions on sincere and non-defective performances did, however, become the bases of his "constitutive rules" for performing such acts.

<sup>28</sup> These are examples of the context dependence of reference not meaning – the meaning of these expressions does not change (how could we understand the speaker in virtue of sharing a language if they did), but the reference does.

evidence that context itself is not limited in the relevant sense, just consider Sbisà's examples of deictic reference and truth value. Does anyone think that antecedent to any utterance, a list could be made of the items of context that would have to be checked to see (i) what an utterance of a deictic terms referred to, or (ii) whether the assertion was true vs. false? It might be replied that it is not required for the 'limitation of context' thesis that it be limited before all utterances. Rather, the utterance itself fixes what is relevant for evaluation. But then the theory reduces to the platitude rehearsed earlier, and is perfectly compatible with internalist theories of speech acts.

#### 5.4. Context is objective

Sbisà understands this to mean:

[context] is conceived as determined, not by the content of the participants' intentional states, but by relevant states of affairs occurring in the world, of which the participants might not even be aware. (Sbisà 2002: 427-428)

This is clearly stronger than the trivial conception rehearsed earlier in terms of contents of (true) contextual beliefs.<sup>29</sup> And if externalism embraces it, then there will be one important difference between it and internalism: externalist will not (always) be able to cite contextual information in explaining why the speaker did what they did, and how the hearer understood them.<sup>30</sup> To "use context" to explain linguistic behavior is to cite beliefs etc. about the context which play the relevant role – context is indirectly explanatory. Does Sbisà's externalism really embrace externalism? No, or at least not without qualification. For instance, in accounting for "informative presuppositions" using an "objective conception of context" she reaches a point where she infers:

So if we take it that S's utterance is a felicitous assertion, then we also have to assume that q is not merely **believed by S (or believed to be shared, etc.)**, but satisfied by the objective context. (Sbisà 2002: 429, emphasis added)

This passage makes it clear that Sbisà's externalism is not pure (or maybe externalism is not pure).

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<sup>29</sup> It is also stronger than Sbisà at times believes. At one point she says "Context is a matter of what interlocutors are doing or attempting to do. There is undoubtedly an underlying subjective element ..." (433). It is not clear how to reconcile these two passages.

<sup>30</sup> For a contextual fact to help explain an agent's behavior, that fact must impinge on the agent in some way. One popular way in cognitive science is to construe the agent as mentally representing that information, then use propositional attitude explanations (mentioned earlier).

## 5.5. Summing up

Perhaps we need a taxonomy allowing for different possible combinations of internal and external factors:

Pure Externalism (PE): felicity (success and non-defectiveness) conditions on illocutionary acts and characterizations of context are stated in non-psychological terms.

Pure Internalism (PI): felicity (success and non-defectiveness) conditions on illocutionary acts and characterizations of context are stated only in psychological terms. However, as noted earlier, (PI) is compatible with a kind of Derivative Externalism (DE) wherein communicative acts can be appraised externally through the satisfaction (or non-satisfaction) of propositional attitudes.

Mixed Internalism-Externalism (MIE): some felicity conditions and characterizations of context are stated in psychological terms, some are not.

It looks like Austin (1962), Searle (1979, 1985), Bach and Harnish (1979) and possibly Sbisà (2002) are Mixed Internalists-Externalists. Strawson (1964), Schiffer (1972), Holdcroft (1978), and Alston (1991, 2000) are Pure Internalists (but also Derivative Externalists). Pure Externalism is a bit harder. Probably Gazdar (1981) qualifies<sup>31</sup>. For instance:<sup>32</sup>

A speech act is a function from contexts to contexts. Thus an assertion that PHI is a function that changes a context in which the speaker is not committed to a justifiable true belief in PHI into a context in which he is so committed. A promise that PHI is a function that changes a context in which the speaker is not committed to bringing about PHI into one in which he is so committed... (Gazdar 1981: 68-69)

So there really is not as much dissent in the field as Sbisà intimates, and Internalism has more going for it than she suggests.

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<sup>31</sup> And perhaps Millikan (cf. Millikan 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Gazdar cites Stalnaker (1978) among his sources. However, Stalnaker denies that his version defines assertion "I should emphasize that I do not propose this as a DEFINITION of assertion, but only as a claim about one effect which assertions have ..." (1978: 323) The three reasons he gives for saying this also seem to apply to Gazdar's version.

## 6. Return to Speech Act internalism and externalism: Putnam-Burge arguments

It is natural to ask, now that we have gone through some speech act detail, if the kinds of arguments Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979) ran for “water” and “arthritis” can be extended at least to speech act terms. Burge, for one, thinks his argument extends to:

... an artifact term, an ordinary natural kind term, a color adjective, a social role term, a term for a historical style, an abstract noun, an **action verb**, a physical movement verb, or any of various other sorts of words (Burge 1979: 79, emphasis added)

Since illocutionary verbs are action verbs, does the argument extend to them?

Davis (1994) asks us to imagine a case of “promising,” where the speaker does not think that a condition on successful promises involves undertaking a commitment to do the act promised (what Searle called the “essential condition” on promising). According to Davis, the speaker who says “I promise to be there” has promised to be there and so undertaken an obligation to be there, even if they do not think that is so. Why? Because “he should have known” that promising involves such an obligation (Davis 1994: 217). Davis thinks this is much like Burge’s complainer, who “should have known” that arthritis is an inflammation of the joints. Likewise, in a language community where “promises” do not obligate, “no one has the notion of promising” (Davis 1994: 217). The problem with this way of setting up Burge’s argument for the case of illocutionary force is that it looks like all that is being claimed is that if a community uses a word that sounds like ours without a necessary condition of ours, it means something different in that language community. That would be trivial and was not how Burge was arguing. Both Putnam- and Burge-type arguments require that everything internal to the speaker/thinker remain the same, but the “environment” (referent, linguistic community) changes.<sup>33</sup> Exactly what is going on in Burge-type cases is controversial, but one common diagnosis is that the speakers at issue have a partial or imperfect grasp of the concept (e.g. arthritis), and that the concept has a dimension of expertise associated with it, in the sense that speakers would defer to experts to decide. For “arthritis” and even “contract” we would be prepared to be informed by chemists and lawyers that such and such was not arthritis or a contract.<sup>34</sup> If this is roughly right, then words and concepts such as “bachelor” and “promising” will not be susceptible to Burge-type arguments. There do not seem to be promising

<sup>33</sup> For a collection of articles on both sides of the Putnam-Burge inspired controversy see Pessin and Goldberg (1996).

<sup>34</sup> Burge (1986) offers an added consideration: a non-standard theory, for instance, a speaker who can identify sofas apart from all other furniture but thinks that they were not made for sitting on, but are religious artifacts.

experts to fill the gap of partial grasping. In other words, it would be hard to imagine two speakers who are “internally” the same, when one thinks promises obligate but the other does not, to then be placed in two linguistic communities to test our intuitions.

Gauker (2003) raises the issue of the relation between what he calls “social externalism” (SE) (what Burge calls “anti-individualism”) as a doctrine about the content of thoughts, and what he calls the “expressive theory of communication” (ETC), which is similar to that proposed in the I-I tradition. Gauker’s view is that “if the very content of a person’s thought is relative to the way words are used in his or her linguistic community, then we cannot turn around and explain the way words are used by saying that the function of words is to convey the content of thoughts” (2003: 1-2). He thinks that putting ETC together with SE alternatively either “leads in circles” (2003: 15), or “lead[s] to absurdity” (2003: 32).

The argument is not easy to follow, partly because it uses features of ETC that are not features of I-I theories. One difference is that Gauker’s ETC is just that, a theory of communication and not speech acts in general, including non-communicative uses of language. Another difference is that on ETC, “the primary function of language is to enable speakers to convey the contents of their beliefs to hearers” (2003: 2). And I-I theories of speech acts do not promote one (class of) speech acts over the others. Nor do I-I theories assume, as Gauker (2003: 1) does, that expressing a belief in communication involves holding that belief (“a speaker has a belief with a certain content and intends a hearer to recognize [it] ... Call this conception of communication the expressive theory of communication.”). Finally, ETC, unlike I-I theories, is said to strive to “explain the use of words” and cite semantic rules “in explanation of speech behavior” (2003: 17). To see this, consider one formulation of the argument:

The expressivist holds that people use words the way they do because the primary function of language is to enable speakers to convey the contents of their beliefs to hearers. Burge’s social externalism states that what it is for a person’s thought to have the content it has is explicable only in terms of the way words are used in the linguistic community. But that means that the expressivist’s explanation of the way words are used leads in circles.<sup>35</sup> So it is not a good explanation. (Gauker 2003: 15)

Clearly, even if this refuted ETC,<sup>36</sup> more work is required to refute I-I theories of speech acts, which are much more modest in their “explanatory” ambitions.

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<sup>35</sup> Though Gauker (2003) begins the passage promising not circularity, but a “*reductio ad absurdum*.”

<sup>36</sup> Burge himself, the source of “social externalism,” rejects Gauker’s conclusions. See his reply to Gauker (2003: 244-250).

## 7. Conclusion

Summarizing, internalists hold that the content of thoughts or the proposition expressed by the utterance of a sentence can be identified and specified independently of things “in the world” that those thoughts or propositions are about. Externalists hold that at least some contents of thoughts and propositions expressed can be identified only by identifying the things in the world they are about. Speech act theory has its own version of the internalism-externalism debate, but it is, at least until recently, implicit rather than explicit. It has to do with the nature of the conditions set down on the analysis of the force of successful speech acts. If a condition restricts the way the “external” world must be, it is an externalist condition. If a condition restricts the mental state(s) of a speaker/hearer, it is an internalist condition. Some theorists seem to side with the internalist end of the spectrum, some with the externalist end, and others offered mixed analyses. We propose a classification of some major speech act theories in terms of internalism and externalism. We also propose a classification in terms of being “Austinian” or “Gricean,” and we go on to outline how speech act theory moved from Austinian to Gricean and why. It has been recently argued by Sbisà (2002) that speech act theory got off the track after Austin by internalizing Austin’s felicity conditions. The guilty parties are mainly Grice and Searle, but the trend continued with Strawson, Schiffer, Bach and Harnish and others. In reply it is noted that the issue of internalism and externalism is more nuanced – there are internal and external elements in most theories. Furthermore, internalism has its virtues, which are largely overlooked, and we attempt to redress that imbalance. We ended by re-taxonomizing internalism and externalism, and we remarked briefly on two attempts, one by Davis (1994) and one by Gauker (2003) to bring the Putnam-Burge style externalist arguments to bear on speech acts.<sup>37</sup>

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